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ABSTRACT

The concept of "professional" is currently a critical issue for teachers. A normative position is offered with which to evaluate the professionalization of teachers, or any other practitioner or producer of work. Professions should not so much be defined by the content of the work but rather more by the manner in which the work is performed. Being a professional revolves around two factors: (1) the right and responsibility to act from principles and not simply the technical rationality of rules, and (2) the right and responsibility to systematically investigate the effectiveness of one's own work. These two factors are related to the principles of justice for the practitioner and caring for the practitioner's clientele. The paper concludes by debunking the comparison of professional medicine to professional education. (Contains 24 references.) (Author)

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The Teacher as Professional:

A Normative Position

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Abstract

The concept of "professional" is currently a critical issue for teachers. A normative position is offered with which to evaluate the professionalization of teachers, or any other practitioner or producer of work. This position revolves around two factors: a) the right and responsibility to act from principles and not simply the technical rationality of rules, and b) the right and responsibility to systematically investigate the effectiveness of one's own work. These two factors are related to the principles of justice for the practitioner and caring for the practitioner's clientele. The paper concludes by debunking the comparison of professional medicine to professional education.

The Teacher as Professional:

A Normative Position

The goal of this paper is lay further groundwork to help teachers act as professionals, whether or not society, or educators themselves, accept the work of teachers as a profession. The manner in which the words professional and profession are typically used, do not so much indicate a real difference from the words "vocation" or "craft" or "trade", as they do society's level of veneration for those types of work. The term profession is a value-laden word, granted to forms of work most valued and esteemed by our society. As Soder writes, "although professional status is seen as elite, virtually all occupational groups can try out: entry to the scramble for elite status is democratic" (1990, p. 35).

Explicating the concept of "professional"

We can ask, as analytic philosophers would, how this word, "professional" is used, and based on those usages, what is a coherent meaning for it? Concepts and words are not static, however, they are social constructions that evolve over time. As Williams (1985) and MacIntyre (1984) demonstrate in the

introductory chapters of their works on ethics, if we rely only on analyses of what "is", instead of what "should be", we lose our ability to be creative, to direct our own development, and to be moral. For example, throughout much of this century psychologists have attempted to "discover" what human "intelligence" is; whereas intelligence is a value word--it shows what type of cognitive abilities a particular psychologist, or psychological school, values. The same with granting the term profession to a line of work, it demonstrates a type of work the speaker highly values.

Following the principles of justice and equality, any kind of work that is a "practice", has the potential to be a profession. MacIntyre (1984) advocates this definition of a practice:

> By a `practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form

> of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice, architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry, biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music. In the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities--of households, cities, nations--is generally taken to be a practice in the sense in which I have defined it. Thus the range of practices is wide: arts sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept. (pp. 187-188).

Although bricklaying is not a practice, masonry is, and thus a bricklayer could qualify as a professional. Picking up garbage is not a practice, sanitation is, therefore a garbage collector

could be a professional. This definition basically allows all systematic work that is in service to a community to be potentially the work of a professional. This meets the principles of equality and justice by allowing nearly everyone the opportunity to be a professional, and avoids the unnatural elitism that has developed around this word-concept. What this implies is that professions should not so much be defined by the content of the work (medicine versus sanitation), but rather more by the manner in which the work is performed. If a profession is the type of work most valued by a society, then we need to change the outlook of society toward the way the work is performed, and not toward the type of work it is.

Working from Principles

Participating in a "practice", however, does not automatically qualify one for the title of professional. Rather, it is necessary that the professional work from principles, and not only from rules; that the professional create guidelines for her practice, and not simply apply technical rationality to her work (Schon, 1987). Technical rationality makes sense when applied to "closed set" problems, and utilizes closed-system

logic. But as Schon (1987) demonstrates, professionals, particularly educators, face unique problems frequently, and technical rationality breakdowns in unique, i.e., indeterminate, situations. In particular, educating humans is necessarily indeterminate and unpredictable (MacIntyre, 1984, see ch. 8). Every student, whether slow or fast, whether `learning disabled' or `gifted', whether troubled or carefree, presents a unique constellation of challenges to the teacher. This does not mean that some methods of teaching don't have applicability across a wide range of students, or that some aspects of education aren't universal. It doesn't imply that technical rationality has no place in the classroom. It does, boldly, state that it is not enough. Schon (1987) in his Educating the reflective practitioner draws on an example from engineering that is directly analogous to teachers' dilemmas of professional practice:

> But, as we have come to see with increasing clarity over the last twenty or so years, the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed, they

> tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations. Civil engineers, for example, know how to build roads suited to the conditions of particular sites and specifications. They draw on their knowledge of soil conditions, materials, and construction technologies to define grades, surfaces, and dimensions. When they must decide what road to build, however, or whether to build it at all, their problem is not solvable by the application of technical knowledge, not even by the sophisticated techniques of decision theory. They face a complex and ill-defined melange of topographical, financial, economic, environmental, and political factors. (p. 4)

Road building can be compared to curriculum building. Perhaps the teacher knows how to teach reading (or perhaps not--direct instruction or whole language, or both, or neither?), but what type of materials should the student read? Should local history, state history, national history, or planetary history be taught? From whose viewpoint? Did Columbus discover America, or

was he an early imperialist invader of lands already occupied, or should "both sides" be presented for the students to decide? Technical rationality can't answer these questions. These questions are questions of principle, and moral values underlie the selection of principles that guide both the means and the ends in education (and all work that is in service to humans and their communities).

Therefore, to be a professional, one must have some autonomy to work from principles, particularly moral principles, that underlie the values of our choices. What principles should teachers adopt to act professionally? Through recognizing the unity of virtues (MacIntyre, 1984, see p. 142 & ch. 11), any principle from love, to justice, to truth would work, but the general principle of "development" is advocated herein. Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) have argued that the aim of education is development, and Bull (1990) has made a good case that to legitimate teacher autonomy in a free society, teachers must "engage in general capacity-developing instruction" (p. 102).

Thus, a professional teacher could, and would, be able to consciously relate all his objectives and curricular materials to

the development of a particular student, or group of students, or a society. This would not happen in retrospect, but would be the guiding light for his choice of teaching techniques and materials. This, of course, implies that teachers need to have the autonomy to make principled decisions, and not be unilaterally "directed" to certain techniques or texts or even required district objectives. This doesn't mean that teachers should be unresponsive to collective district decisions, rather, they are responsible to not only their students, but the parents, the school district, the nation--indeed the whole planet. They need the autonomy, however, to decide in what way they are responsible in what particular contexts, and to have a school district forum in which they can vindicate their autonomy.

This is suitable to the American notion of justice, as it allows all practitioners the possibility of the esteem of professionality. The mason, the chemist, the sanitation worker can be involved in selecting the ends of their practice. What are the best purposes for a brick wall; what is the goal for the use of this chemical I've been requested to make; when, where, and why should this garbage be removed?

Researching one's own practice: inquiry, reflection, communication

The second factor that is critical for a practitioner to consider themselves professional is investigation into the effectiveness of their own practice. For teachers, this specifically means examining the effectiveness of their principles-into-action, the outcomes of their techniques and materials with students (cf. Carr & Kemmis, 1986). There are three principles that encourage selection of this factor.

1. Loving care. If teachers love and care (Noddings, 1984, 1986) about their clients, their students, then they want to know if they are helping them learn, and how they can enhance their learning. To do so they must, at a minimum, take the time to reflect on their practices (Schon, 1987). They will perform action research[1] that objectively demonstrates their success, or

[1]By action research is not meant "soft" research for the non-scholarly practitioner; rather, it means quantitative and/or qualitative research that is directly in service to action (Argyris, 1982; Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985). The benefit of this kind of research isn't in academic promotion, prestige, or some distant consumer of research; but rather it is part of a feedback loop to directly impact the quality of the practice of the researcher.

failure. If they demonstrate failure, it is still partial success, as that failure will guide them to change their practices, in service to the students. The literature on action research is small, but important (Lewin, 1946; Corey, 1949a, 1949b, 1953; Nixon, 1981; Perry-Sheldon, & Anselmini, 1987; Sanford, 1970; Schon, 1987; Simmons, 1984; Stevens, 1986).

2. Golden rule self-consistency, i.e., teachers must practice what they preach. If teachers expect development from students, they have to demonstrate, or model development in front of them. What could be a more powerful way of demonstrating a teacher's development than to engage her students in helping her reliably assess her effectiveness in helping them learn, and taking action steps to change her practice based on that feedback?

3. Freedom and autonomy carry responsibility (Bull, 1990), and to justify professional autonomy teachers need to be in control of their own profession--not district administrators, and not ivory-tower researchers who "do research for" teachers (college professors should study their own teaching effectiveness). This does not mean teachers would not be

directly involved in bilateral dialogue with administrators and college faculty in designing and executing inquiry into the practice of education. Rather, teachers shall gladly invite others' input as equals, however, they would not let others choose the ends nor the means of reflection on their own practice.

So is teaching a profession? As Soder (1990) argues, "No, not yet". Once a significant number of workers in a practice work from principles, and research their own practice of those principles, then that practice deserves the generic appellation: profession. Fortunately, teaching is moving that direction.

Medicine and Education

In the rhetoric, however, for the teachers' scramble to attain this lofty term, "professional", they invariably compare themselves to the archetypical profession: medicine. There are several major problems with this. Fenstermacher (1990) points out three of these. First, the mystification of knowledge; physicians have tended to guard their most simple procedures, whereas teachers aim to give their knowledge away. Second, social distance; physicians generally avoid becoming involved in

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the whole life of their clients, whereas teachers must prepare students for "whole life". Third, reciprocity of effort; physicians have traditionally aimed to take the majority of control toward curing clients' ailments, however, teachers expect students to make the major contribution to their own education.

Besides Fenstermacher's three criticisms, there are other crucial factors in the comparison of physicians to teachers. The teacher impacts the whole child, and unavoidably, directly or indirectly, guides the development of not only their cognitive abilities, but the emotional, physical, and moral growth of the child as well (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). This impact and guidance isn't for fifteen minutes, several times a year -- it is six hours a day, five days a week, nine months of the year.

In theory, most physicians are aware that the physical, emotional, cognitive, and moral aspects of health are all inter-related, yet in practice they concentrate on one particular area: the physical or biological. Although well-child clinics, and preventive medicine are becoming increasingly established, physicians are seldom involved in the proactive physical

development of the child. Rather, they medically "educate" only for problems in physical development. In this sense a teacher's job is terrifically more complex and varied than a physician's. The teacher must give direct educative support to both proactive and remedial aspects of the physical, emotional, cognitive, and moral needs of the child; whereas the physician tends to focus on only the remedial, and in one area, the physical.

One could argue that physicians work more frequently from principle than teachers (although one may doubt this), and their research program has been much tighter, thus qualifying them collectively for the term "profession". Yet, physicians suffer from an over-emphasis on technical rationality as well (Schon, 1987; Boryshenko, 1987); and most of the practitioners have left the control and autonomy of investigating practice to the university medical professors. Thus, by our definition, many individuals physicians would not qualify as professionals (they don't choose "end-states", insurance companies do for them; they don't systematically investigate their effectiveness with their own clients, but leave medical college researchers to study "similar" clients).

The "tight" research program of the medical profession is appreciated by the human community, as it has greatly enhanced our biological lives. Yet look at the parameters -- a physician's practice focuses on physical remediation -- yet a teacher's practice focuses on both enhancing "normal" development, and remediation, in the cognitive, emotional, moral, and physical domains. Granted, the formal course of teacher preparation concentrates on one area: cognitive development. Nevertheless, when you develop an authentic educative relationship on a daily basis, as teachers must, it becomes impossible to separate the impact of the emotional on the cognitive, the moral on the physical, the cognitive on the physical, etc. Therefore it is not too surprising that teachers are a bit "behind" medicine in achieving professional status. A pediatrician goes to University for 8 years, and then has a 3-5 year resident specialty in child medicine, to remediate the physical lives of children; a teacher goes to University for 4-6 years, including a 1/2 year student teaching "residency", to develop and remediate the cognitive, emotional, moral and physical lives of children. The materialism of American society

drives us to value the physical more than the cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects of our being. Perhaps as society comes to value the development of children more, and the conscious educative development of the whole child, teachers will have further societal support to become professionals.

Summary

"Professional" is more a prescriptive, value-laden term, than an objective description of a practice. To warrant this valued appellation, practitioners shall significantly contribute to the selection of goals, objectives, and end-states of their own practice; and then conduct action research to evaluate the effectiveness of the ends of their practice. When an individual accomplishes this, they may be considered professional; when collective group of practitioners orient in this manner, the practice may be consider a profession.

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